

No birds were procured, but a series of 29 eggs was obtained from Fuerteventura and Lanzarote.

Clutches of Quail's eggs were taken at—

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Caldereta (Fuerteventura), | 5. v. 13. |
| 2. „ „ | 5. v. 13. |
| 3. La Peña „ | 12. v. 13. |
| 4. Haria (Lanzarote), | 23. v. 13. |
| 5. „ „ | 26. v. 13. |

This series show the usual variety of colouring. As I have no means of ascertaining whether they belong to *C. c. coturnix* or *C. c. africana*, I have not given any measurements or description.

XII.—Description of a strange New Zealand Wood-Hen.

By GREGORY M. MATHEWS and TOM IREDALE.

(Plate XI.)

PROBABLY no small group of birds has been so much discussed as the New Zealand Wood-Hens, and, without exception, the investigators have been compelled to relinquish the problems without any satisfactory solution having been achieved.

The examination of the series available shows at once the reason of an indefinite result, viz., the accumulation of odd unsexed individuals instead of carefully localised sexed series. The restrictions placed upon scientific collectors by the New Zealand Government, coupled with the unrestricted advances made by the enemies of the birds, the felling of bush, etc., suggest that no definite solution will be reached.

In our Reference List ('Ibis,' 1913, pp. 211-214) we were compelled to lump under the name *Gallirallus hectori* (Hutton), the forms of the South Island Wood-Hen previously known as *Ocydromus australis* and *O. hectori*. To anyone acquainted with these birds and at all familiar with the topography of the South Island of New Zealand, such a lumping would savour of the absurd. The most casual

criticism of the birds preserved would simply convince the observer of the incongruity of such a conclusion. The lack of a series, however, negated any subdivision that would gain acceptance, and a study of the literature revealed a similar hesitancy upon the part of previous workers, most fully acknowledging the incompleteness of their conclusions.

First, it should be observed that there has been little confusion regarding the North Island Wood-Hen. Though comparatively quite a number of birds are in collections from that Island, these show little variation, and there has been no confusion in its nomenclature. The climate and topography of that Island does not show the variation that is found in the South Island.

The first striking form met with in the South Island is that known as the Black Wood-Hen. We admitted this form to specific rank as it occurs alongside a form of normal coloration. Our conclusion was that it was a fixed melanistic form breeding true, and confined to the wet, heavy-bushed south-west coast of the South Island. It is replaced on the tops of the adjoining mountains by a pallid bird, to which Hutton gave the name *Ocydromus hectori*. The lowland form found in company with the Black Wood-Hen was first described as *Rallus australis* Sparrman. It has puzzled every investigator to decide whether these three are specifically distinct or not, and much of this difficulty is due to lack of specimens. In our Reference List we decided in favour of three species, but we could not delimit the subspecies into which these species were certainly divisible. However, as the name *G. hectori* (Hutton) was given to a mountain bird, it seemed certain that it was inapplicable to the common lowland form, as every writer had noted previously.

The examination of the Reischek collection in Vienna by one of us has proved that the birds from any given locality are constant, and the lowland form was differentiated under the name of *Gallirallus hectori reischeki* (Iredale, Austral Avian Record, vol. ii. 1913, p. 15).



W. Newman imp.

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GALLIRALLUS TOWNSONI.

We now draw attention to a most remarkable form of Wood-Hen which we name

Gallirallus townsoni, sp. n. (Plate XI.)

The forehead, lores, sides of face, throat, ear-coverts, fore neck, and all under parts pure white. The white encroaches on each side of the occiput but is divided by a regular stripe of umber. There is a dash of umber under the eyes, a small patch on each side of the breast, a minute patch on each side of abdomen (groin); the outer sides of the thighs are streaked with umber, with a small irregular patch on the vent. The general upper coloration is umber, the feathers having darker streaks on the head and neck, this dark streak being emphasised in the elongated scapulars. The back and rump are almost uniform umber-brown, the bases of the feathers ashy grey, the tips very indistinctly barred with darker. The feathers are quite short. The primaries are clear rusty buff regularly barred with sepia: in one wing the first primary is pure white, in the other the first four are pure white. The tail-feathers are unbarred. A small patch of white feathers is seen on each side among the scapulars.

The bill has the upper mandible pallid horn-colour; the lower darker. The legs are also pallid horn-colour.

Type in Coll. G. M. Mathews from Westport, on the west coast of the South Island of New Zealand.

A solitary specimen, such as has been described, might well have been passed over as an albinistic freak and no further notice taken of it.

The receipt of two specimens identical in their peculiar coloration induced investigation, and we find that three others agreeing with these are already on record from the same locality.

It is unfortunate that in these materialistic days such an interesting phase of bird evolution would be passed over practically without comment unless a name was inflicted upon the phase. We have, therefore, described this peculiar bird

as a new species and given it a new name with the hope of thus arousing interest.

When Buller recorded the first specimens he classed them as aberrations of *Ocydromus earli* (= *Gallirallus australis*). They certainly approach this species more than they do *G. hectori*, but they differ from both in several respects.

The general upper coloration of the latter is "isabella-brown or fawn coloured," or "sepia centrally, with sandy edges" giving a sandy appearance. The primaries are fulvous or rusty buff with regular bars, while the tail is also regularly barred.

G. australis is generally of a rusty fulvous above, the primaries deeper with irregular darker barring, which is generally missing on the outer edge, and the tail is unbarred.

The present species lacks altogether the rusty coloration of the latter and has the tail unbarred, but the primaries are regularly barred and of the same coloration as those of *G. hectori*.

It is obvious that if these birds be simply considered as semi-albinistic aberrations, we would still find in the normal form an easily recognisable subspecies.

The birds all came from the neighbourhood of Westport, on the west coast of the South Island, and this fact at once draws attention to the Kiwi which T. H. Potts named *Apteryx mollis*. Notwithstanding this nomination, this form has been ignored as simply an albinism, though, as the following remarks show, it merited some better treatment.

In the Trans. New Zeal. Inst. vol. v. 1873, p. 196, Potts wrote:—"It is probable that other species will be added to this interesting genus (*Apteryx*); for the past two or three years we have known of the existence of a white Kiwi, information concerning it having been scantily furnished at intervals by some wandering miner or prospector. Specimens have at different times been obtained from the bush in the Martin Bay district. From the descriptions that have been gathered they are not albinos, and their occurrence has been too frequent for them to be classed amongst specimens

showing a mere accidental and rare variation either of *A. oweni* or *A. australis*; the plumage is stated to be remarkably loose, soft, and flocculent. It is suggested that the name of *mollis* would not be inappropriate as its specific designation. A specimen of this beautiful little *Apteryx* in the Dunedin Museum has the bill slightly *curved*, showing an arc elevated about one-fifteenth of its length.

“ Bill from gape to point	3 in.	9 lines.
Tarsus	2	5
Middle toe and claw	2	4

“ Plumage white, extremities of the feathers more or less stained with yellowish; bristly integument at the base of the mandibles yellowish; narrow yellowish stain round the eye; irides brown, feathers soft to the touch; habitat, bush about Martin Bay, west coast of Otago.

“ Other specimens have been obtained at Greymouth.”

Albinism is a very noticeable characteristic of the birds of New Zealand, the majority of the endemic species having been noted as presenting such aberration, whilst it is very remarkable that albinisms have been already recorded among most of the introduced birds. Yet we have no examples of fixed albinism throughout the avifauna; at the same time the melanistic tendency has been just as often remarked, and we have quite a number of fixed melanisms. We can easily account for these melanistic forms, as, where they have mostly originated and many still live, the country is densely bush-clad, with a very heavy rainfall.

The peculiarity of the bird under discussion, and of *Apteryx mollis* Potts, is that these “albinistic” forms have developed in this same bush-clad country with its heavy rainfall, and which, theoretically, should prohibit the evolution of such aberrations. Yet, according to Potts—and in this case also—these “albinisms” are frequent. We are quite unable to suggest any solution that would satisfactorily account for the apparent fixation of such forms under the conditions noted.